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ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The resumed tenth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, was held at Geneva from 18 to 22 August 1997. The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly, annexed to the present note, the report on that session.

* A/52/150 and Corr.1.

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ANNEX

Report of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, on its resumed tenth session

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I. INTRODUCTION

Opening and duration of the session

1. The resumed tenth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, was held at Geneva from 18 to 22 August 1997. The session was convened in accordance with paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 50/112 of 20 December 1995, entitled "Elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa". At its resumed tenth session, the Committee held seven meetings (1st to 7th).

II. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

A. Officers of the Committee

2. The Bureau of the Committee, as elected at its sixth, eighth, ninth and tenth sessions, is as follows:

Chairman: Mr. Bo Kjellén (Sweden)

Vice-Chairmen: Mr. Fassassi Adam Yacoubou (Benin)
Mr. Alok Jain (India)
Mr. José Urrutia (Peru)

Rapporteur: Mr. Anatoli M. Ovchinnikov (Uzbekistan)

Working Group I

Chairman: Mr. Mohamed Mahmoud Ould El Ghaouth (Mauritania)

Vice-Chairmen: Mr. Mohammad Reza H. K. Jabbary (Islamic Republic of Iran)
Mr. Erwin Ortiz-Gandarillas (Bolivia)
Mr. Franklin C. Moore (United States of America)

Working Group II

Chairman: Mr. Takao Shibata (Japan)

Vice-Chairmen: Mr. David Etuket (Uganda)
Mr. Samvel Baloyan (Armenia)

B. Adoption of the agenda

3. At its 1st meeting, on 18 August, the Committee adopted the following agenda:

1. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work.

2. Preparation for the Conference of the Parties.

3. Special action:

   (a) Urgent action for Africa;

   (b) Action taken in the Asian, Latin American and the Caribbean, and Northern Mediterranean regions.

4. Status of signature and ratification of the Convention.

5. Review of the situation as regards extrabudgetary funds.

6. Adoption of the report of the Committee on its resumed tenth session.

C. Attendance

4. Representatives of the following States attended the session: Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Barbados, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, France, Finland, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Holy See, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syri n Arab Republic, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

5. The following United Nations offices and organs were represented: United Nations Development Programme, Office to Combat Desertification and Drought, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Institute for Training and Research, United Nations University, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and World Food Programme.

6. The following specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system were represented: International Labour Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Bank, World Meteorological Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations Industrial Development Organization, Global Environment Facility.

7. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: African Development Bank, Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, Asia African Legal Consultative Committee, Centre for Environment and the Arab Region and Europe, Commonwealth Secretariat, European Commission, Intergovernmental Authority for Development, International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, League of Arab States, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Organization of African Unity, Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel, Sahara and Sahel Observatory, Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands, Southern African Development Community, Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

8. The following non-governmental organizations were represented: Aleyne, Amigos de la Tierra, Association de formation et d'appui au developpement, Association developpement durable, Association pour la protection de la nature, Australian Conservation Foundation, Both Ends, Conféderation des ONG d'environnement et de développement de l'Afrique centrale, Coordinamento delle Organizzazioni non governative per la Cooperazione Internazionale allo Sviluppo, Développement environnement formation insertion sociale, Earth Action Network, Ecociencia, Fundación Ecuatoriana de Estudios Ecológicos, EcoNews Africa, Environment Liaison Centre International, Environmental Monitoring Group, Environmentalist Society, Environnement et développement du tiers-monde, Espoir, European Environmental Bureau, Felege Guihon International, Fondation centrafricaine pour la sauvegarde des ressources, Fundación del Sur, German NGO Forum, Guinée écologie, Hope for Women, Institut Mariam Diallo, International Central Asian Biodiversity Institute, Journalists Environmental Association of Tanzania, Mouvement écologique algérien, Naurzum National Nature Reserve, Nigerian Environmental Study/Action Team, Panamerican-Panafrican Association Inc., ProNaturaleza, Salubrité, propreté, hygiène et technique d'assainissement, Society for Conservation and Protection of the Environment, Solidarité Canada Sahel, Uganda Women Tree Planting Movement, Volontaires dans la lutte contre la désertification et la sécheresse, Wilderness Society, Yonge Nawe Environmental Action Group, Youth for Action.

D. Documentation

9. The documents before the Committee at its resumed tenth session are listed in appendix I to the present report.

E. Accreditation of non-governmental organizations

10. At its 1st meeting, on 18 August, the Committee, bearing in mind paragraph 19 of General Assembly resolution 47/188 of 22 December 1992 and rule 49 of the rules of procedure of the Committee (A/AC.241/3), decided to approve the accreditation of the non-governmental organizations listed in document A/AC.241/9/Add.14 (see appendix II, decision 10/15).

F. Participation of intergovernmental organizations in the work of the Committee

11. At its 1st meeting, on 18 August, the Committee, bearing in mind the provisions of General Assembly resolution 47/188 on the participation of observers in the work of the Committee in accordance with the established practice of the General Assembly, decided to accord observer status in its work to the intergovernmental organizations listed in document A/AC.241/L.5/Add.3-5 (see appendix II, decision 10/16).

III. PREPARATION FOR THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES

12. The Committee considered the question of preparation for the Conference of the Parties (agenda item 2) at its 2nd, 3rd and 5th to 7th meetings, from 19 to 22 August 1997.

Bureau of the first session of the Conference of the Parties

13. At its 7th meeting, on 22 August, statements regarding the Bureau of the first session of the Conference of the Parties were made by the representatives of Benin (on behalf of the African Group), Panama (on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group), the Islamic Republic of Iran (on behalf of the Asian Group), Belgium (on behalf of the Western European Group) and Armenia (on behalf of the Eastern European Group).

14. At the same meeting, upon the proposal of the Chairman, the Committee welcomed the candidacy of Italy for the Presidency of the first session of the Conference of the Parties.

Global mechanism

15. At its 7th meeting, on 22 August, the Chairman informed the Committee that, as a result of informal consultations conducted by Mr. Pierre-Marc Johnson (Canada), the following amendments had been agreed upon to paragraph 4 (e) of section A, appendix I, of document ICCD/COP(1)/5 on global mechanism: compilation of revised offers of the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the United Nations Development Programme, which would be submitted to the Conference of the Parties in document ICCD/COP(1)/5/Add.1. The amended paragraph reads as follows:

> "Guide and direct, as requested [and as appropriate], the channelling and allocation of resources mobilized for the purpose of the Convention, including [its own] resources made available to it for its functioning and activities [, as defined in section A of this appendix,] from bilateral and multilateral sources through the host and other organizations, in [a continuous,] [an adequate,] predictable and timely fashion to local, national, subregional and regional levels for the implementation of action programmes, projects and activities to combat desertification and/or mitigate the effects of drought in affected developing country parties, particularly in Africa."

Action taken by the Committee

Designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning: procedure for selection of the city to host the permanent secretariat

16. At its 7th meeting, on 22 August, the Committee adopted a draft decision entitled "Designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning: procedure for selection of the city to host the permanent secretariat", submitted by the Chairman as a result of informal consultations (see appendix II, decision 10/17).

Housing of the global mechanism

17. At its 7th meeting, on 22 August, the Committee adopted a draft decision entitled "Housing of the global mechanism", submitted by the Chairman as a result of informal consultations (subsequently issued in document A/AC.241/L.41) (see appendix II, decision 10/18).

18. At its 7th meeting, on 22 August, the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, informed the Committee that the Group would be submitting two draft decisions, entitled "The establishment of a committee on the review and implementation of the Convention" and "Collaboration between the permanent secretariat and sister conventions", as documents of the tenth session, for consideration at the first session of the Conference of the Parties (subsequently issued in documents A/AC.241/L.42 and L.43).

IV. SPECIAL ACTION

19. The Committee held a discussion on the question of special action: urgent action for Africa (agenda item 3 (a)) and special action: action taken in the Asian, Latin American and the Caribbean and Northern Mediterranean regions (agenda item 3 (b)) at its 4th to 6th meetings, from 20 to 22 August 1997.

20. A summary by the Chairman on the consideration of the item is contained in appendix III.

V. STATUS OF SIGNATURE AND RATIFICATION OF THE CONVENTION

21. The Committee considered the question of the status of signature and ratification of the Convention (agenda item 4) at its 1st meeting, on 18 August 1997.

22. The Executive Secretary informed the Committee that 108 countries had ratified or acceded to the Convention. The following countries deposited their instruments of ratification or accession since the date of the report on the first part of the tenth session of the Committee and during or just before its resumed session:

Angola (30 June 1997)

Antigua and Barbuda (6 June 1997)

Argentina (6 January 1997)

Armenia (2 July 1997)

Austria (2 June 1997)

Bahrain (14 July 1997)

Barbados (14 May 1997)

Brazil (25 June 1997)

Burundi (6 January 1997)

Cambodia (18 August 1997)

Cameroon (29 May 1997)

Côte d'Ivoire (4 March 1997)

Cuba (13 March 1997)

Djibouti (12 June 1997)

Dominican Republic (26 June 1997)

El Salvador (27 June 1997)

Equatorial Guinea (26 June 1997)

Ethiopia (27 June 1997)

France (12 June 1997)

Greece (5 May 1997)

Grenada (28 May 1997)

Guinea (23 June 1997)

Guyana (26 June 1997)

Honduras (25 June 1997)

Iceland (3 June 1997)

Iran, Islamic Republic of (29 April 1997)

Ireland (31 July 1997)

Italy (23 June 1997)

Kazakhstan (9 July 1997)

Kenya (24 June 1997)

Kuwait (27 June 1997)

Luxembourg (4 February 1997)

Madagascar (25 June 1997)

Malaysia (25 June 1997)

Mozambique (13 March 1997)

Myanmar (2 January 1997)

Namibia (16 May 1997)

Nigeria (8 July 1997)

Pakistan (24 February 1997)

Paraguay (15 January 1997)

Saint Kitts and Nevis (30 June 1997)

Saint Lucia (2 July 1997)

Saudi Arabia (25 June 1997)

Seychelles (26 June 1997)

Syrian Arab Republic (10 June 1997)

Tajikistan (16 July 1997)

Uganda (25 June 1997)

United Republic of Tanzania (19 June 1997)

Yemen (14 January 1997)

VI. REVIEW OF THE SITUATION AS REGARDS EXTRABUDGETARY FUNDS

23. The Committee considered the question of the review of the situation as regards extrabudgetary funds (agenda item 5) at its 5th meeting, on 21 August 1997.

24. The Executive Secretary informed the Committee that in view of the short intervening period between the resumed tenth session of the Committee and the Conference of the Parties, no separate document on the review of the situation as regards extrabudgetary funds was prepared for the resumed session. However, he indicated that a document had been prepared by the Secretariat for the Conference of the Parties.

25. The Executive Secretary also reported on the number of participants who were offered travel funding from the Special Voluntary Fund for the resumed session and also announced the actual contributions and outstanding pledges received since the first part of the tenth session of the Committee for both the Special Voluntary Fund and the Trust Fund for supporting the negotiating process.

26. The representative of Luxembourg indicated during the session that his Government would be contributing to the extrabudgetary funds, but that he was not in a position to specify the amount at that time.

VII. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ITS RESUMED TENTH SESSION

27. At the 7th meeting, on 22 August, the Committee adopted the draft report on its resumed tenth session as contained in document A/AC.241/L.39 and authorized the Rapporteur to finalize it by incorporating therein the proceedings of the meetings held and the decisions taken during the final meetings of the session.

APPENDIX I

List of documents before the Committee at its resumed tenth session

Document symbol	Agenda item	Title or description
A/AC.241/9/Add.14	1	List of non-governmental organizations recommended for accreditation by the Committee
A/AC.241/71	1	Agenda and proposed organization of work for the resumed tenth session
A/AC.241/L.5/Add.3-5	2	Notes by the Secretariat entitled "Participation of intergovernmental organizations in the work of the Committee"
A/AC.241/L.39	6	Draft report of the Committee on its resumed tenth session
A/AC.241/L.40	2	Draft decision submitted by the Chairman, entitled "Designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning: procedure for selection of the city to host the permanent secretariat"
A/AC.241/L.41	2	Draft decision submitted by the Chairman, entitled "Housing of the global mechanism"
A/AC.241/L.42	2	Draft decision submitted by the United Republic of Tanzania, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, entitled "The establishment of a Committee on the review and implementation of the Convention"
A/AC.241/L.43	2	Draft decision submitted by the United Republic of Tanzania, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, entitled "Collaboration between the permanent secretariat and sister conventions"

APPENDIX II

Decisions adopted by the Committee at its resumed tenth session

Decision 10/15

Accreditation of non-governmental organizations

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, bearing in mind paragraph 19 of General Assembly resolution 47/188 of 22 December 1992 and rule 49 of the rules of procedure of the Committee (A/AC.241/3), decides to approve the accreditation of the following non-governmental organizations:

Amigos de la Tierra, Spain

Association de réflexion d'échanges et d'action pour l'environnement et le développement

Association développement durable

Association for Rural and Environment Care (AREC)

Association pour le développement des techniques agro-écologiques (ADTAE)

Association pour la protection de l'environnement et le bien-être social (APEBES)

Coordinamento delle Organizzazioni non governative per la Cooperazione Internazionale allo Sviluppo (COCIS)

Disaster Mitigation Institute

Ecological Movement of Kyrgyzstan "Aleyne"

Fondation des amis de la nature (NATURAMA)

ForUM (The Norwegian Forum for Environment and Development)

Gania Unnayan Committee

Groupement d'appui aux initiatives économiques des femmes

Institut Mariam Diallo

International Central Asian Biodiversity Institute (BIOSTAN)

International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage

Journalists Environmental Asociation of Tanzania (JET)

Law and Environment Eurasia Partnership (LEEP)

Les amis de la terre, Djibouti (AMITERD)

Organisation centrafricaine pour la défense de la nature

Organisation féminine pour le développement du Haut-Nkam (OR.FE.DE.HN)

Organisation mauritanienne pour la protection de l'environnement et la lutte contre la désertification

PanAmerican-PanAfrican Association

Réseau de développement d'agriculture durable (REDAD)

SAPHTA (Salubrité, propreté, hygiène et technique d'assainissement)

Secrétariat permanent des organisations non gouvernementales (SPONG)

Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

Sindh Rural Women's Up-lift Group

Socio-Ecological Union

SouthPanAfrican International

Uganda Association for Social Economic Progress

Universidad Internacional de Andalucía

Vihar Samaj Kalyan Sansthan

Volontaires dans la lutte contre la désertification et la sécheresse (VOLUDES)

Vuum Tree Planting and Nursery Society

World Vision International, Senegal

Decision 10/16

Participation of intergovernmental organizations in the work of the Committee

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, bearing in mind the provisions of General Assembly resolution 47/188 of 22 December 1992 on the participation of observers in the work of the Committee in accordance with the established practice of the Assembly, decides to accord observer status in its work to the following intergovernmental organizations:

Arab Organisation for Agricultural Development (AOAD)

CAB International

Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands (RAMSAR)

Decision 10/17

Designation of a permanent secretariat and arrangements for its functioning: procedure for selection of the city to host the permanent secretariat

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee,

Recalling its decision 9/2 and following the recommendation of the Contact Group on the physical location of the permanent secretariat that met on 19 August 1997 during the resumed tenth session of the Committee,

Recommends to the Conference of the Parties at its first session the following procedure for the selection of the city to host the permanent secretariat:

(a) An informal and confidential poll should be conducted among countries that are parties to the Convention that are present on the day of the poll for the purpose of obtaining a consensus on the physical location of the permanent secretariat;

(b) The poll should be carried out in a plenary meeting on Friday, 3 October 1997, under the chairmanship of the President of the Conference, under the direct supervision of the Chairman of the Contact Group and with the support of the secretariat;

(c) Only accredited delegates of parties will participate. It is, therefore, essential that parties provide their letters of credentials as early as possible to allow the Bureau of the Conference, acting as Credentials Committee, to review them and prepare a report in time for the poll;

(d) Each party shall indicate its preference on a ballot prepared for this purpose, with a clear mark in the box adjacent to the name of the city that the party considers the most appropriate for the physical location of the permanent secretariat. The completed ballot shall be placed in a closed box during the plenary meeting;

(e) Once the voting process is concluded, the box will be opened in the presence of the Chairman of the Contact Group, the representatives of the three countries offering to host the permanent secretariat and the Executive Secretary. Ballots containing more than one mark or left blank will be considered invalid and will not be counted;

(f) If one of the cities obtains a majority of valid preferences, it will be proposed as a consensus decision. If no city obtains a majority, a second and final round of voting will be carried out to elicit preferences between the two cities obtaining the most votes in the first round. The city obtaining the greatest number of votes in the second round will be proposed by the President as a consensus decision of the Conference on the same day. The detailed results of the poll will be kept secret.

Decision 10/18

Housing of the global mechanism

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee,

Recalling article 21 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, in particular paragraphs 4 to 7,

Recalling also the invitation by the Chairman of the Committee to organizations that might be interested in hosting the global mechanism to submit such an interest in writing,

Noting the statement made by the President of the World Bank at the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly in June 1997 as well as the statement made by the representative of the World Bank at the resumed tenth session,

Noting with appreciation the additional information provided by the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the United Nations Development Programme with respect to their respective offers to house the global mechanism,

Recalling its decision 10/3, in particular paragraph 4, in which it requests the interim secretariat to present the submissions of the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the United Nations Development Programme to the Conference of the Parties at its first session,

1. Requests the Conference of the Parties at its first session to consider the offers of the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the United Nations Development Programme, including any suggestions they deem necessary, and to take appropriate action on the matters related to the selection of an institution to house the global mechanism;

2. Requests the secretariat, in consultation with the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the United Nations Development Programme to develop proposals on administrative and operational modalities of the global mechanism for consideration and adoption by the Conference of the Parties at its first session;

3. Invites the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank to consult on and develop a proposal on the possible collaborative institutional arrangement for the global mechanism for submission to, consideration by and appropriate action by the Conference of the Parties at is first session.

Appendix III

[Original: French]

Summary by the Chairman on the question of special action

1. During its consideration of the agenda item on the implementation of the resolution on urgent action for Africa and interim action in other regions affected by desertification, the Committee heard a number of statements by the countries concerned and by competent organizations.

2. Those statements indicated that, in every region of the world, countries had made good use of the interim period just ended to lay the foundations for the expeditious implementation, under favourable conditions, of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa.

3. In Africa, numerous discussions at all levels and with different categories of actors enabled many countries, by the close of this interim period, to define a methodology for formulating national and subregional action programmes.

4. There are still disparities in the intensity of the efforts being made and, consequently, in the speed with which activities have been undertaken. However, it is encouraging to note that initiatives such as national information seminars and decentralized workshops are now being conducted in all of the countries affected.

5. The countries that are most advanced in this process have held their national forums and have managed, as a result, to clarify their strategy for preparing activities leading to the adoption of a national action programme.

6. It should be noted that the countries concerned have paid priority attention to certain important dimensions, such as the mission of national steering committees for the process, internal efforts to mobilize financial resources and the intensification of the consultative process based on efforts to achieve a convergence of views with the main bilateral and multilateral partners.

7. At the subregional level, all of the competent organizations are now fully engaged in the formulation of subregional action programmes. These organizations, such as the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), have rightly noted that, at the conclusion of the subregional forums held in Africa during the inter-sessional period, veritable terms of reference were elaborated in the form of priority areas of action. Thus, the next phase will consist of the formulation of proposed activities.

8. At the regional level, the pan-African conference on the implementation of the Convention, held in March 1997, gave African experts and political authorities an opportunity to consider a draft outline for the formulation of the regional action programme. Subsequently, they drew up specific guidelines for that process.

9. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the negotiations held in Havana in March 1997 in the context of a regional conference on the implementation of the Convention will serve as a frame of reference, since the Latin American and Caribbean countries identified, on that occasion, possible linkages between national action programmes and the regional programme. In addition, some countries of the region, such as Haiti, are considered by their peers as countries which should be given priority because of the difficulties they have experienced as a result of drought and desertification.

10. New approaches are also emerging in the wake of the strengthening of ties of cooperation under the Convention among countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru.

11. Among the priority areas in which the countries of the region agreed to undertake immediate action are capacity-building, the establishment of an information network, awareness-raising activities and the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation on the issue of combating desertification.

12. At the regional level, priority is being given to the establishment and operation of the regional coordination mechanism. To this end, the countries of the region are seeking more active support from development partners.

13. In Asia, a number of countries have undertaken diverse activities in recent months, in the areas of both information and scientific and technical research. In relation to the latter area, several countries (China, Israel and the Russian Federation) offered to open their centres of excellence, which are known for their high level of expertise, to other developing countries affected by desertification. These research units are already in a position to provide high-quality training in areas such as water resources management, the ecology of arid zones and the harnessing of renewable sources of energy.

14. At the regional level, the regional ministerial conference held in Beijing in May 1997 enabled the chief decision makers to devise arrangements for formulating the regional action programme. The priority areas identified included reforestation and soil conservation, pastureland management and water resources management.

15. In the northern Mediterranean, the countries concerned pursued intensive negotiations during the inter-sessional period. In this context, the meetings held in Lisbon; Murcia, Spain; and Matera, Italy attest not only to the consistency of these efforts, but also to the countries' commitment to the Convention.

16. In this region as well, the priority activities already identified will serve as a basis for the action programme which the countries concerned plan to put into practice.

17. In conclusion, we note with satisfaction that the decisions taken at the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on urgent action for Africa and interim action in general have enabled activities under the Convention to get under way even before the first Conference of the Parties. Both the positive and the negative aspects of this experience should guide us in the very important period now beginning.